

[About us](#)[Calling 999](#)[Working for us](#)[Talking with us](#)[News](#)[Health professionals](#)[Getting involved](#)Location: [Home](#) | [Calling 999](#) | [New ambulance response categories](#)[Convert page into PDF](#) [Print this page](#) [f](#) [t](#) [v](#) [r](#)[Calling 999](#)[When to call 999](#)[How to call 999](#)[What happens when you call 999](#)[Who will treat you](#)[Emergency heart care](#)[Emergency stroke care](#)[Emergency trauma care](#)[What to do if you have flu symptoms](#)[New ambulance response categories](#)

New ambulance response categories

From 1 November, the way in which we categorise emergency calls is changing in line with new standards being introduced across the country.

The new system of responding to patients has been introduced by NHS England, following the largest clinical ambulance trials in the world.

Known as [the Ambulance Response Programme](#), the changes aim to help all ambulance services reach the sickest patients more quickly, and end 'hidden waits' for lower category patients by ensuring response time targets apply for every patient for the first time.

For calls that aren't immediately life-threatening, call handlers now have more time to understand the patient's condition before sending an appropriate response or referring them to an alternative healthcare setting.

[Stroke](#) and [heart attack](#) patients will benefit because this will enable us to send an ambulance crew who can treat them and take them to a specialist centre for further care, rather than a single responder who can begin treatment quickly but can't transport them.

We will now be expected to reach the most seriously ill patients in an average time of seven minutes. The clock will only stop when the most appropriate response arrives on scene, rather than the first.

This will free up more vehicles and staff to respond to other emergencies.

Categories and response times

Under the new system, there are four categories of calls - please see the videos below about each:

- Category one: for life-threatening injuries and illnesses, specifically cardiac arrest. These will need to be responded to in an average time of seven minutes.
- Category two: for emergency calls, such as stroke patients. These will need to be responded to in an average time of 18 minutes.
- Category three: for urgent calls such as abdominal pains, and which will include patients to be treated in their own home. These will be responded to at least nine out of 10 times within 120 minutes.
- Category four: less urgent calls such as diarrhoea and vomiting and back pain. Some of these patients will be given advice over the telephone or referred to another service such as a GP or pharmacist. These less urgent calls will be responded to at least nine out of 10 times within 180 minutes.

More information

- [An 'easy read' NHS England document about the new standards](#)

Category 1 calls

Category 2 calls

Category 3 calls

Category 4 calls

